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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: PART 1 OF 2: SECTARIAN VIOLENCE FORCES MAJOR SHIFT
IN BAGHDAD DEMOGRAPHICS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1479
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 1506
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 1977

Classified By: DEPUTY POLCOUNS CHARLES O. BLAHA, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Sectarian violence has caused significant demographic shifts throughout Baghdad. Before February 2006, few areas in Baghdad comprised a clear Sunni or Shia majority; more than half of Baghdad neighborhoods still contained a mixed population. As of July 2007, only about 20 percent of Baghdad neighborhoods remain mixed, nearly all of them in central Baghdad along the Tigris River. More than half of all Baghdad neighborhoods now contain a clear Shia majority. Sunnis mainly reside in three relatively small areas of the city, all of them surrounded by predominantly Shia neighborhoods. The concentration of Sunnis into limited enclaves surrounded by Shia areas makes it easier for Shia militias to push toward a final "cleansing" of the city's Sunnis. This concentration could also distort local and provincial elections to favor Shia candidates. "Fault lines" separating adjacent Sunni and Shia neighborhoods continue to experience the most intense sectarian violence, and to provoke further displacement. Baghdad's displaced persons appear unlikely to return to their former homes without significant improvements in security and service provision. This cable provides an overview of the consequences of these demographic trends in Baghdad, with specific focus on the shifts taking place in eastern Baghdad. Septel describes the demographic trends in western Baghdad. End Summary.

Baghdad's Mixed Areas Have Largely Disappeared

[1](#)2. (SBU) Before February 2006, few areas in Baghdad comprised a clear Sunni or Shia majority; more than half of Baghdad neighborhoods still contained a mixed population. After February 2006, only about 20 percent of Baghdad neighborhoods are mixed Sunni-Shia, nearly all of them concentrated in central Baghdad along the banks of the Tigris River in the Karkh and Rusafa districts. These districts contain some of the oldest parts of Baghdad, and also most of the city's remaining mixed neighborhoods; families in these areas have long lived together and tend to be of a higher socioeconomic status.

Demographic Shifts Unlikely to Reverse

[1](#)3. (C) Numerous Baghdad government officials and internally displaced persons (IDPs) inform PRToffs and Poloffs that the city's residents will not return to their homes unless Coalition Forces (CF), as opposed to Iraq Security Forces (ISF), control security in their former neighborhoods. Most Sunni IDPs say that they do not trust the ISF to provide the

protection they require to return to, and remain in, their homes in predominantly Shia areas. They claim that ISF have proved sectarian and incapable of providing security. Moreover, Sunni IDPs report that, in many cases, Iraqi security forces with militia links helped to displace them from their homes in the first place. Shia IDPs also state that they do not trust Iraqi security forces to protect them if they return to homes in predominantly Sunni areas, because ISF lack the commitment and ability effectively to combat well-armed Sunni insurgent groups.

¶4. (C) Several IDPs and GOI officials described another major obstacle to reversing the demographic shifts in Baghdad. They said that residents generally apply more stringent standards when considering whether to return to their homes than they do when considering whether to flee their homes in the first place. Before finally deciding to abandon their homes, many residents of Baghdad reportedly tolerate a vast deterioration in their essential services, and only leave when militias or criminals pose an imminent threat to their lives. Once they have left home, however, many IDPs report that they will not return unless both security and/or services have significantly improved. To attract displaced persons in Baghdad back to their homes, numerous sources report, many IDPs require not only enduring and tangible improvements in the security of their former neighborhoods, but also an equal or better level of essential service provision than they currently receive in their new location. It is thus very difficult to persuade people to return to their formerly mixed neighborhoods.

Possible Consequence of Demographic Shifts:
Cleansing of Sunnis from Baghdad

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¶5. (C) The concentration of Sunnis into three areas may make it easier for Shia militias to drive Sunnis from the city in the event of a significant U.S. drawdown or a significant escalation of sectarian violence. Baghdad's Sunni areas currently resemble embattled cantons surrounded by predominantly Shia areas, in which the Shiite Jayish Al-Mahdi (JAM) militia exercises considerable influence. Even within Sunni-majority enclaves, Baghdad's Sunnis continue to experience violent displacement. Whereas Shia areas throughout Baghdad tend to quiet down after Shia militias have "cleansed" them of Sunnis, Sunni areas have not generally calmed down after Shia have fled. Continuing instability in Sunni areas results from violent extortion by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), sectarianism within the ISF, and ongoing operations by Coalition Forces against AQI and other insurgents in Sunni areas.

Possible Consequence of Demographic Shifts:
Skewed Elections

¶6. (C) Demographic shifts in Baghdad could skew provincial election results to favor Shia candidates, depending on electoral rules and procedures. The GOI will, in effect, disenfranchise Sunni voters if it requires residents to vote in their neighborhoods of permanent residence, rather than in the neighborhoods to which they have been displaced. Sunni voters will simply not return to neighborhoods controlled by Shia militias or ISF. In this scenario, Shia candidates would sweep provincial elections because Shia voters feel safe traveling to many more Baghdad neighborhoods than do Sunni residents of the city.

East Baghdad Turns Shia

¶17. (U) Shia residents now dominate eastern Baghdad's five central districts, most of which used to be mixed. Due to considerable JAM influence in Shia areas, Sunnis rarely travel there. Before February 2006, Sadr City figured as the only predominantly Shia district in eastern Baghdad. Since February 2006, however, Sadr City, Karada, 9 Nissan (also known as New Baghdad), and the eastern part of Adhamiya have turned primarily Shia. Rusafa remains mixed, with a slight Shia majority. The Adhamiya and Shamsiya neighborhoods in the Adhamiya district, in addition to the Al-Fadl neighborhood of the Rusafa district, comprise the only remaining majority-Sunni areas of east Baghdad.

Adhamiya District Polarizes: East Becomes Shia,
West Remains Sunni or Mixed

¶18. (U) The Army Canal that cuts through the center of Adhamiya district now serves as a sectarian dividing line. Before February 2006, only two neighborhoods in the western half of Adhamiya district -- the Adhamiya and Tunis neighborhoods -- contained predominantly Sunni populations; the rest of the district's 11 neighborhoods were mixed. Since February 2006, Adhamiya has polarized. Sunni or mixed areas make up the west side of the Army Canal, and Shia areas dominate the east side. Adhamiya and Shamsiya (both west of the canal) are predominantly Sunni; Maghrib, Qahira and Waziriya (all west of the canal) remain mixed. Shaab, Hay Ur, Beida, Basateen (all east of the canal) and the eastern half of Tunis (adjacent to the east side of the canal) have become predominantly Shia.

¶19. (C) Sunnis rarely cross the Army Canal into eastern Adhamiya due to what they perceive as pervasive JAM influence in areas such as Shaab. For fear of Sunni insurgents and AQI, Shia from outside the area also do not generally cross the canal into mixed or predominantly Sunni areas, especially the part of Adhamiya enclosed by a separation barrier Coalition Forces began to erect in April. (NOTE: In May, this barrier caused controversy in the media and among some locals. (Reftels A, B, and C.) END NOTE.)

¶10. (C) Sunni-Shia relations remain hostile in Adhamiya district. Sunnis claim that Shia militias infiltrate their neighborhoods from adjacent Shia areas to attack or abduct civilians, allegedly with the tacit or explicit support of the ISF. Shia, for their part, claim that Sunni militants are responsible for car bombs and other terrorist attacks in the area. Sunnis, in turn, aver that Iraqi Army personnel sometimes collectively punish residents of Sunni areas by shooting electricity transformers in neighborhoods from which

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attacks on Shia neighborhoods originate.

Karada: Once Mixed, Now Shia

¶11. (C) Before February 2006, all of Karada's 12 neighborhoods remained mixed except for 6 Kanun, the east half of which was Shia and the west half of which was Sunni. Sunni elites associated with the former regime occupied a large portion of the Karada peninsula. Now all of Karada is predominantly Shia, except for the Diyala neighborhood, which remains mixed.

¶12. (C) Sunnis and Shia have fairly good relations in Karada. Although mainly Shia IDPs have moved to Karada, some wealthy Sunnis have moved to the area as well because of its comparatively security environment and its reputation for sectarian tolerance.

Nine Nissan (New Baghdad): Once Mixed, Now Shia

¶13. (C) Before February 2006, one neighborhood in 9 Nissan was predominantly Shia and the rest were mixed. By July 2007, all of 9 Nissan's nine neighborhoods have turned majority-Shia. Sunnis generally avoid 9 Nissan due to JAM's pervasive influence.

Rusafa: Once Mixed, Remains Mixed

¶14. (U) Most of Rusafa's 13 neighborhoods were mixed before February 2006, except the predominantly Sunni neighborhoods of Mustansariya and Al-Neel. As of July 2007, Mustansariya and Al-Neel became predominantly Shia. The rest of Rusafa remains mixed except for Al-Fadl, which became predominantly Sunni after the systematic expulsion of Shia from the area.

¶15. (C) Sectarian relations are lukewarm in Rusafa. Sunnis and Shia have long lived together in the area, where (like Karada) residents enjoy a somewhat higher socioeconomic status than does the rest of eastern Baghdad. However, the district abuts both Sadr City and 9 Nissan, where JAM wields considerable influence. Rusafa residents report that JAM elements come and go from the area at will.

Sadr City: Always Shia, Still Shia

¶16. (C) Sadr City has remained predominantly Shia. Before February 2006, Sadr City was the only majority-Shia district of eastern Baghdad. Although PRToffs and Poloff have heard reports that a handful of Sunnis (mostly married to Shia) remain in Sadr City, Sunnis from outside Sadr City consider the area off limits for security reasons.
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